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A LETTER FROM RACINE IN 1843¹

RACINE, December 19th, 1843.

MY DEAR UNCLE: Having a little leisure time a few evenings' since, I attempted to mark out on paper something to give you an idea of the location & general appearance of our village. The production you will find on the other part of this sheet. It is (or I need not say) that it is a very imperfect thing, but with a little explanation it may serve the purpose designed. You will observe that it lies directly on the shore of the Lake, Michigan Street being on the beach. It then rises quite abruptly forty feet above the Lake level & then assumes an almost perfect level. By a reference to the accompanying map you will observe that Root River comes in & passes through nearly the centre of the village. At present however the principal part of the village is on the south side of the River, yet it is now building up on the north side. The river is nearly on a level with the Lake & its banks on the south side are of the same height of the Lake shore, & very bold, while on the other side they are more sloping. All of the public buildings are on the south side of the River & all of the business is done on that side. The principle street is Main St^t & nearly all of the mercantile business is done on it. There are now twenty-six stores large & small on this street, ten on the east side & sixteen on the west. Be[d]sides [sic] a great number of Lawyer offices, Doctor^s offices Printing offices, & mechanics shops of nearly every branch of business. The Court House & Registers office, together with the best Hotel are situated on the west side of the public square fronting the Lake. There are three good Hotels in the place & another splendid, & spacious one soon to be erected just below our store on the opposite side of the street. There are fourteen lawyers, five physicians now practicing here. The Congregational is the only church completed. That is a very plain & cheap building designed only as a temporary one. The Methodist have a very good church in process of erection. The episcopalians worship in the Court House & the Baptists in the Seminary. All have organized churches & societies with settled pastors. Sabbath schools &

¹ This document was recently acquired by this Society through the courtesy of the Connecticut State Library, Hartford.—Editor.



Bible classes are connected with each congregation. The Harbor is now in process of construction. Root River is a stream of considerable importance, varying in width from one to two hundred feet & navigable for any class vessels for two miles up. The mouth is barred up with sand thrown in by the Seas of the Lake, but opened by the spring freshets. In constructing a Harbor it is necessary to build out two piers one each side of the mouth of the river to a certain distance, first to get into deep water and 2d to get past the moving sand on the shore, then by dredging out the bar the piers will prevent its again being formed. The north pier is completed & the south one is commenced & prepared for the operation of the spring freshets. When this Harbor is completed it will admit Steam Boats & vessels into the River & not only be very convenient for loading & discharging but will also be a safe harbor from storms & gales. Heretofore all goods & passengers have been shipped & landed by means of boats & scows. Great advantage is calculated upon from the completion of this harbor. It is being built by the citizens of the village. They have expended already upwards of Ten thousand dollars on it & have just unanimously agreed to raise five thousand dollars more to prosecute the work. This place enjoys the advantage of one of the finest back countries in the whole west. There has already been purchased here this season upwards of eighty thousand bushels of wheat, besides, Lead, Pork, Hides, Furs &c &c. The country is becoming settled & improved with unparalleled rapidity. A farmer told me to day that a ten acre field of wheat yielded him over three hundred & fifty bushels. Wheat is now selling for sixty-four & sixty-five cents. Village lots are now held at pretty high prices varying from \$100 to \$600. of course property on Main St is valued the highest. Buildings rent enormously high, according to the cost of the same. They rent upon an average at least for 25 per cent. The village now contains probably not far from twelve to fourteen hundred inhabitants & from its location, its commercial advantages & its back country it must grow & become an important place. Lands for some distance back are valued very highly, yet good farms with some improvements can be bought at very low prices.

There is no government land within nearly forty miles, that is desirable quality—Many farms have doubled in value within twelve months, such has been the rush of emigration, to the Territory. David our former engineer, came out here a few weeks ago & has purchased him a farm of 80 acres within about 12 miles of here, with a comfortable frame house, fifteen acres, broken & fenced & ten acres of wheat in all for four hundred dollars. He has moved on to it & I am truly glad that David is well fixed.

Thursday Dec^r 21st. Yesterday for the first time I took a short trip into the country. My object chiefly was to look at a piece of land about nine miles from here. It is a farm of one hundred & twenty acres. I[t] has been claimed by preëmption but the right has expired & it can now be bought at government price 1.25 per acre. We think of & shall probably enter it. It is a very fine piece of land well located, mostly prairie but some wood on it. It will make a very fine farm for wheat or anything else. Lands adjoining cannot be bought for five dollars per acre. The country back of us is all taken up & quite thickly settled. After getting back two & a half miles we come on to a prairie nine miles wide & twelve miles long dotted with groves occasionally, but in some portions of it for miles not a tree is to be seen. This extensive prairie is covered with settlements & a large portion fenced into farms & under cultivation. It is a most magnificent sight to get on to some prominent bluff (as it lies gently rolling) & survey the almost boundless prairie, covered with farm houses & enclosures. The soil it is needless to say is rich & very productive. Wool growing & the raising of stock is commanding considerable attention & these prairies are well adapted to that business. They furnish an abundance of pasturage & from the swails can be cut natural hay equal & even superior for cattle to the best English hay. These lands are watered by springs chiefly, but have occasional living streams. After crossing the prairie you again come into timber land & then prairie. Walworth County lies directly west of this & is considered the best agricultural county in the Territory. The produce raised back sixty & seventy miles comes to this market.

This is undoubtedly to be the principal wheat market in the Territory. Good flouring mills are already in operation & we have as good quality flour as any other. Wheat has sold to day as high as 67½¢ per bushel. This we consider too high to warrant our purchasing. We have bought some at lower prices, but have sold it again. My opinion is that produce & other property will be lower in the spring & money will not be as plenty. I found this opinion on the fact of there being such an immense quantity of goods in the country. I am certain that there are more than can be sold & paid for promptly. I fear New York people will find that they have done too much credit business the past season. If it be true that they have sold the amount of goods reported, it will prove a disastrous business. The country was not prepared for it & cannot afford it. Many merchants altogether mistake the character & wants of this western country, & bring out immense stocks of merchandise, larger than the country demands. Although it is a great country & a numerous population, still their wants are comparatively few & simple. Another evil is, merchants increase too fast in proportion to the country & balance of the community. The truth is, merchandizing enjoys no peculiar advantages in a new country, it is the advance of real estate & land that affords better success to investment. At this moment I know of no investment that offers such inducements as property in this village or in good lands back of it. But I fear I have already detained you too long on this subject & am also making a long letter without much matter in it. I will just say that our friend Coddington² is in town & lectured last evening upon the subject of Anti slavery. He is to spend several days here. The cause meets with considerable favor in this place & a society has been formed. It may also be said that moral and religious sentiments are in a good degree recognized & cherished in this community. The Sabbath revered & other religious institutions are very generally observed or at least respected. I will say with regard to our business, that it has thus far been very good & fully met our calculations. My health is good & I think my ambition is full

² Rev. Ichabod Coddington, later editor of the *Waukesha American Freeman*.—Editor.

equal to my strength. William is well & very well pleased with our location & business. I hear from Caroline often, which relieves my intense & abiding anxiety for her welfare. This being seperated from my dear wife is any thing but agreeable to me. I am sure that if to acquire a fortune, it became necessary for me to be seperated from her any considerable portion of the time, I should give up the chase & content myself with what happiness I derive from her society. Kindly remember me to my dear Aunt & other friends. With many thanks dear Uncle for your oft repeated kindness & paternal regard, believe me very faithfully Yours

H. S. DURAND

Addressed: Maj. Elisha A. Cowles

Meriden

Single

Connecticut

[Postmark] Racine, Dec. 22, Wis. T.